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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT, MARCH 2, 2005

¶1. On 3/1, the evening television newscast "Hoy Mismo" on Channel 3 broadcast a statements by:

- President Ricardo Maduro: "For the first time in history, we did a report on the execution of minors and we created a special commission which has brought to justice many policemen who have been accused of wrongdoing... We should ask ourselves, has Honduras improved in the fight against human rights violations? Has the government proved its will to work on it? I think we have,"

- Supreme Court President Vilma Morales: "I think we all know who are responsible of the executions, there's no State policy or any law that allow executions of any kind,"

- Attorney General Ovidio Navarro: "I believe we have seen this report every year, the State Department is presenting to the international community a report which is almost the same for two or three years," and

- Bertha Oliva: director of the NGO Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), "Summary and arbitrary executions are a reality in Honduras and we can't hide this fact... the Honduran State is responsible of protecting human rights of all Hondurans."

¶2. On 3/1, the evening television newscast "Vica Noticias" on Channel 9 broadcast a statement by Oscar Alvarez, Minister of Public Security, "Some human rights organizations have accused the country without having actual proof of those facts, and they done so to get financial aid especially from European countries... the State Department has based its findings on information from those organizations, they haven't done their own investigation... the State Department has recently signed a three-year agreement for 2.4 million dollars to support the Ministry of Public Security, and they wouldn't give us any aid if they believed these accusations were true."

¶3. On 3/2, the Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Heraldo" published a half-page article quoting the head of the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation (DGIC) Napoleon Nazar entitled "State Department report is reckless" with the subheading "The security and judicial institutions rejected the report on human rights violations."

¶4. The San Pedro Sula-based liberal paper "Tiempo" carried several articles, one of them with a statement by Minister of Public Security Alvarez, titled "Honduras doesn't have a policy of executions" with the subheading "Human rights organizations make these accusations to get money from abroad." It also ran statements by President Maduro entitled "Maduro: Many policemen are being processed for the death of minors", by Supreme Court President Morales titled "Violent deaths can't be regarded as human rights violations", and by COFADEH leader Oliva, entitled "The report reflects the reality in Honduras" with the subheading "The authorities should start by respecting the life of the citizens and the Constitution."

It also published an editorial entitled "Summary Executions." "The State Department report on Human Rights reflects the situation of violence and terrorism in Central America, especially in Honduras. From the summaries published by several news agencies, we can conclude that there are severe flaws in the justice systems throughout Central America, all of them influenced by corruption, as well as a marked abuse from police forces."

"We are aware of that reality, even though this document isn't supposed to go into specific details. However, this information has to be taken seriously, since it has been properly evaluated, and its importance can't be overlooked because it aims to promote changes on the attitude of the government and a critical viewpoint from society."

"Nevertheless, the response from the authorities in question has been the usual, trying to conceal the truth, which has been demonstrated by the statements of the Minister of Security Oscar Alvarez, who brags of teaching the American police on how to deal with juvenile gangs. Meanwhile, the Honduran government, especially the Ministry of Security and its head Oscar Alvarez, have actually tarnished the image of Honduras abroad."

Palmer